

# Employer Responsibilities and Courses of Action Following a VOSH Inspection



## Virginia Occupational Safety and Health Program

Revised: November 2008

Dear Employer:

As part of our continuing efforts to assist employers in providing a safe and healthful workplace for every Virginia worker, the Virginia Occupational Safety and Health (VOSH) program has developed this document, *Employer Responsibilities and Courses of Action Following a VOSH Inspection*. This document contains important information regarding your responsibilities and opportunities to respond to the attached citation(s) and notification of penalty.

Generally, the rights and responsibilities discussed in this document apply to all employers. Differences exist for public sector and political subdivision employers and are explained in the VOSH *Administrative Regulations Manual*.

Thank you for your help and cooperation in our joint effort to protect the occupational safety and health of Virginia's workers.

*C. Ray Davenport*

Commissioner of Labor and Industry

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Your workplace was recently inspected under the authority granted by Va. Code § 40.1-49.8. The inspection revealed conditions which we believe to be in violation of the law as detailed in the attached citation(s) and notification of penalty form. All items listed on the citation were discussed by the Compliance Safety and Health Officer (CSHO) with your representative at the closing conference.

This document, *Employer Responsibilities and Courses of Action Following a VOSH Inspection*, is provided to further explain your rights and responsibilities and to provide guidance for responding to this notice and any necessary future action.

For added information not covered here, or for answers to any questions you may have, please contact the appropriate VOSH Regional Compliance Manager. See locations for VOSH regional and field offices in the back of this document. Please refer to the VOSH inspection number located on the enclosed documents in all correspondence.

## **1. Employer Courses of Action**

As an employer, you must take one of the following courses of action:

- a. If you agree to the citation and notification of penalty, you must:
  - (1) correct the condition by the date set in the citation; and,
  - (2) pay the penalty, if one is proposed.
- b. If you do not agree and wish to contest, you must do so within 15 working days of your receipt of the citation(s) and notification of penalty form, or your citation becomes final. You must specifically contest in writing any or all of the following:
  - citation;
  - penalty;
  - abatement date.

If you do not contest within 15 working days, your citation becomes a final order of the Commissioner, and cannot be appealed.

**NOTE:** For details on how to contest a citation, penalty, or abatement date, see Section 7 of this document and refer to Sections 270 and 310 of the VOSH Administrative Regulations Manual (ARM).

**NOTE:** Discrimination by employers, against employees for exercising their legal rights (e.g., filing a complaint with VOSH or raising safety and health issues with the employer) is prohibited. Employees discriminated against may be entitled to rehiring or reinstatement with back pay plus interest.

## **2. Posting Requirements for the Citation**

The citation, or a copy of it, must be posted at or near the place each violation occurred or other areas where employee notices are posted and available to all employees. It must remain posted for three (3) working days, or until the violation is corrected, whichever is longer. Saturdays, Sundays, and state holidays are not counted as working days. In addition, the employee representative, if there is one, must be notified upon receipt of any citation.

## **3. VOSH Regional Compliance Manager Must be Advised of Any Corrective Action Taken**

For violations that you choose not to contest, you must promptly notify VOSH by letter that you have corrected the cited conditions by the abatement date set in the citation.

Your abatement letter must explain the specific action taken with regard to each violation and the approximate date the corrective action was completed, and must include a copy of a receipt for the completed work, or a photograph showing that it was corrected.

When the citation permits an extended time for abatement, you must ensure that employees are adequately protected during this time. For example, the citation may require the immediate use of personal protective equipment by employees while engineering controls are being installed. If your corrective actions take place during a lengthy abatement period (90 days or more), periodic reports

should be submitted to indicate progress. Please see the sample "Abatement Plan or Progress Report" in the *Administrative Regulations Manual*. This report should be sent to the Regional Director of the Department of Labor and Industry in your region. Addresses and telephone numbers of regional offices are listed at the end of this document.

#### **4. Penalty Payments**

The penalties itemized on the enclosed citation(s) and notification of penalty for items which are not contested become a final order of the Commissioner and must be paid within 15 working days after your receipt of the citation and notification of penalty.

If, however, you contest your citation(s) in good faith, you need not pay for those items contested until a final decision is rendered. The final decision would be in the form of either a settlement agreement with VOSH resulting in a final order of the Commissioner, or a review of your case by the circuit court resulting in a court order which would either uphold, modify, or eliminate the penalties. Please keep in mind that contested citations that are not settled by an agreement will go to court.

If you decide not to contest the citation or penalty, payment of the uncontested penalties should be mailed to:

Accounting Office  
Department of Labor and Industry  
Powers-Taylor Building  
13 South Thirteenth Street  
Richmond, Virginia 23219-4101

A self-addressed envelope in which you may mail your penalty payment will be furnished with the citation. When paying a penalty, your check or money order should be made payable to: "Treasurer of Virginia."

***NOTE:*** *For public sector and political subdivision employers, please refer to Section 280 of the VOSH Administrative Regulations Manual regarding penalty assessment.*

#### **5. Interest and Collection Costs**

Pursuant to Va. Code § 40.1-49.4.A.4.(a), the Commissioner of the Department of Labor and Industry shall have the authority to assess interest on all past-due penalties and administrative costs incurred in the collection of penalties for violations of VOSH laws and standards. Interest charges are assessed at an annual rate in accordance with Va. Code § 2.2-4805.

Interest shall accrue from the date on which the citation and penalty, as proposed or adjusted, became a final order of the Commissioner, i.e., 15 working days from your receipt of the citation and proposed penalty, unless you file a notice of contest. Interest charges shall be waived if the full amount owed is paid within 30 calendar days of the final order date.

After 30 calendar days from the final order date, the debt shall be considered as past-due unless a satisfactory payment arrangement has been made. If the debt remains unpaid for more than 90

calendar days, it will be deemed delinquent and referred either to the Office of the Attorney General, or to an appropriate collection agency. Interest and administrative costs will also be assessed.

**NOTE:** *Public sector and political subdivision employers should consult Section 280 of the VOSH Administrative Regulations Manual regarding penalty assessment.*

## **6. Informal Conference and Settlement**

Each employer is given the opportunity to request an informal conference before deciding whether to contest the citation(s). You are strongly urged to request this informal conference no later than five (5) working days from the receipt of the citation(s). A request of the informal conference will not extend the 15 day working period within which you must either pay the penalties or elect to contest. You may request an informal conference through the VOSH Regional Compliance Manager at the regional office address shown on the transmittal letter that forwarded the citation(s) and notification of penalty. You may use the informal conference as an opportunity to:

- obtain a clearer understanding of the specific standards which apply;
- obtain a better explanation of the violation(s) cited;
- discuss ways to correct the violation(s);
- discuss questions concerning any proposed penalty;
- discuss how the penalty is calculated and any mitigating circumstances which might affect the proposed penalty;
- discuss problems with abatement dates;
- discuss problems concerning employee safety and health practices; and
- obtain answers to any other related questions you may have.

You are encouraged to have an informal conference if you foresee any difficulties in complying with any part of the citation.

An employee representative shall be given the opportunity to participate in an informal conference requested by the employer. This same right will be extended to the employer when an informal conference is requested by the employees. It is the duty of the employer, if he has requested an informal conference, to notify employees and the employee representative about the conference as soon as the time and place of the conference have been established.

**NOTE:** *Public sector employers should consult Sections 280, 290, and 300 of the VOSH Administrative Regulations Manual for the applicable informal conference procedures.*

If you do not contest the citation(s) within 15 working days, the citation(s) will become a final order. Neither the VOSH Regional Compliance Manager nor the Commissioner can amend or change a citation or penalty which has become a final order. Please keep in mind that once a citation becomes a final order, the VOSH Regional Compliance Manager may only either extend the time you need to abate a violation, or advise you on abatement methods. He cannot amend or change any citation or penalty which has become a final order.

Please refer to Section 320 of the VOSH Administrative Regulations Manual for additional information regarding the extension of abatement time.

If settlement cannot be reached after you file a notice of contest, a bill of complaint will be prepared and filed by the Commonwealth's Attorney to set the case for trial before the circuit court. If you wish to settle the case after the bill of complaint has been filed, your attorney must contact the office of the Commonwealth's Attorney in the jurisdiction where the inspection occurred and indicate your desire to settle the case. A notice of contest may be withdrawn, resulting in the implementation of the original citation(s) and notification of penalty.

## **7. How to Contest**

As previously stated, you have the right to contest any portion of the citation, notification of penalty, or abatement date. If you do not agree with the citation or any part of it, you have 15 working days from the date you receive the citation and notification of penalty in which to contest.

***NOTE:*** *Public sector and political subdivision employers should consult Section 280 of the VOSH Administrative Regulations Manual regarding penalty assessment.*

To contest, you must notify the VOSH Regional Compliance Manager at the regional office address shown on the transmittal letter that forwarded the citation(s) and notification of penalty. The Regional Compliance Manager must be notified in writing within 15 working days after receipt of a citation and notification of penalty. Please note that Saturdays, Sundays, and state holidays are not counted as working days.

This written notification, or notice of contest, must clearly state what is being contested, e.g., the citation, the penalty, the abatement date, or any combination of these. For example, you could state, "I wish to contest the citation and penalty issued for items 3 and 4 of the citation issued June 27, 2006." The purpose of filing a notice of contest is to reach an agreement with VOSH regarding the citation, the penalty, and/or abatement date, and to preserve your legal right to a trial should a settlement not be reached. In addition, please note that your contest must be made in good faith. A contest filed solely to avoid your responsibilities of abatement or payment of penalties will not be considered a good faith contest.

The written notice of contest must be posted in a conspicuous place at or near where each violation occurred or other areas where employee notices are routinely posted and available to all employees and shall be kept in good repair and in unobstructed view. In accordance with Section 40 C. of the Administrative Regulations Manual, (16 VAC25-60-40), the notice of contest shall remain posted until all proceedings concerning the contest have been completed.

As previously stated, if your notice of contest is properly filed and the matter is not settled, VOSH will initiate judicial proceedings by referring the contested issues to the appropriate Commonwealth's Attorney who will file a bill of complaint with the clerk of the circuit court of the jurisdiction in which the violation occurred. The clerk will issue a subpoena requiring you to appear in circuit court. Should you fail to answer the bill of complaint, a default judgment will be entered against you.

You may withdraw your notice of contest at any time. However, withdrawing your notice of contest results in your obligation to pay the original penalties.

Public sector and political subdivision employers may contest citations or abatement orders by so notifying the VOSH Regional Compliance Manager, in writing, within 15 working days from receipt of the citation. Contest procedures to be followed by public sector employers are in the VOSH Administrative Regulations Manual.

**NOTE:** *Your employees or their authorized representative may contest any or all of the abatement dates set for violations if they believe them to be unreasonable.*

A proper contest of any item of an alleged violation suspends your obligation to abate the cited hazard and pay the penalty until the item contested has been judicially resolved. If only the penalty is contested, the abatement requirements must be met. If only some items on the citation are contested, the other items must be corrected and the corresponding penalties paid. When a notice of contest is withdrawn, you will still be responsible for abating the violations and paying the penalties.

## **8. The Contest Process**

If the notice of contest has been filed within the required 15 working days, every effort is made to reach a settlement between you and VOSH. As stated in Sections 6 and 7 of this document, if a settlement cannot be reached, a bill of complaint will be filed to set the case for trial before the circuit court.

A trial will be scheduled before the circuit court in the jurisdiction in which the violation occurred. Employees may participate in the abatement portion of the trial as well. Each party before the circuit court must be represented by an attorney. The trial will include the examination and cross-examination of witnesses. The judge may affirm, modify, or eliminate any contested item of the citation or penalty.

Any party to the case may appeal the judge's ruling to the Court of Appeals.

Public sector and political subdivision employers may contest citations or abatement orders by notifying the Commissioner in writing within 15 working days from receipt of such documents. This written notice of contest should be sent to the VOSH Regional Compliance Manager at the regional office address shown on the transmittal letter that forwarded the citation(s) and notification of penalty.

If controversies or issues involving a citation issued to a political subdivision of the Commonwealth cannot be resolved at an informal conference, the Commissioner shall then follow the applicable procedures set forth in the VOSH Administrative Regulations Manual.

## **9. Requests for Extension of Abatement Time**

Abatement dates are assigned on the basis of the best available information at the time the citation was issued. When events beyond your control or other circumstances prevent an employer from meeting an abatement date, a request for extension of abatement may be appropriate.

This procedure is used when the 15 working day contest period has expired and you have not contested the citation. It may be used when you have not been able to meet the abatement requirements of the citation due to circumstances beyond your control. If you have made a good faith effort to comply, you may submit a written request for an extension of abatement to the VOSH Regional Compliance Manager.

As stated above, a request for an extension of abatement time must be in writing. It must include all of the following information:

- a. The steps you have taken so far in an effort to achieve compliance and the dates on which the steps were taken;
- b. The additional time period you need in order to comply;
- c. The reason why you need additional time;
- d. The interim steps you are taking to safeguard your employees against the cited hazard during the abatement period; and
- e. A statement that this request has been posted, and, if appropriate, provided to an authorized representative of the affected employees.

A copy of the request must remain posted for ten days, during which your employees may file an objection. Further information on a request for an extension of abatement time may be obtained from the VOSH Administrative Regulations Manual and from the VOSH Regional Compliance Manager.

#### **10. Follow-up Inspection and Failure to Abate**

A follow-up inspection may be conducted by VOSH to verify that you have:

- a. Posted the citation as required;
- b. Corrected the violations as required in the citation; and
- c. Adequately protected employees during multi-step or lengthy abatement periods.

The law provides for penalties for failure to post the citations and for failure to correct violations. Failure to correct a violation may carry a penalty of up to \$7,000.00 for each day during which the violation continues. You also have a continuing responsibility to comply with the law. Any new violations discovered during a follow-up inspection will be cited and penalized where appropriate.

In order to achieve abatement by the date set forth in the citation, abatement efforts must be promptly initiated. Providing false information on your efforts to abate is punishable under the law by criminal fine, imprisonment, or both.

#### **11. Employee Courses of Action**

Employees or their authorized representatives may contest in writing any or all of the abatement dates set for violations if they believe them to be unreasonable. Employees have 15 working days from the date the employer received the citation and notification of penalty to contest. You are encouraged to contest within five (5) days of receipt of the citation(s). The citation which you, as the employer, must post, advises the employees to contact the VOSH Regional Compliance Manager if they wish to contest. The filing of an employee contest does not suspend an employer's obligation to abate.

#### **12. Prohibition on Discrimination Against Employees for Exercising Rights**

Va. Code §§ 40.1-51.2:1 and 40.1-51.2:2 provide that no employer shall discharge or discriminate against an employee who has exercised his rights under this law (e.g., filing complaints with VOSH,



or raising safety and health concerns with the employer). Complaints from employees who believe they have been discriminated against will be investigated by VOSH authorities. If the investigation discloses probable violations of employee rights, the Commissioner will attempt to have the violation(s) corrected without economic loss to the employee through a voluntary agreement. If an agreement cannot be reached, the Commissioner will file an action in circuit court. The court, for cause shown, can restrain violations and order appropriate relief, including the rehiring or reinstatement of the employee to his former position with back pay plus interest of up to 8% per year.

### **13. Consultative Assistance**

Should you need consultative assistance in correcting the violations or help in improving your safety and health program, contact the Division of Cooperative Programs at (804) 786-8707. This service is provided without charge.

An on-site consultative visit shall not take place subsequent to a VOSH enforcement inspection until the employer has been notified that no citation will be issued, or if a citation is issued, an on-site consultation shall only take place with regard to those citation items which have become final orders. Again, citations become final orders if not contested in writing within 15 working days from receipt.

### **14. Types of Violations**

**Serious Violation:** This is a violation in which an accident or illness could occur which would most likely result in death or serious physical harm, unless the employer did not know or could not have known of the violation. The maximum penalty is \$7,000 per violation.

**Other-than-Serious Violation:** This is a violation that has a direct relationship to job safety and health, which is not a serious violation. The maximum penalty is \$7,000 per violation.

**Repeat Violation:** A violation is repeated if there has been a prior final order against the same employer for the same or a substantially similar violation of a standard, rule, or regulation, within the past three years. The maximum penalty is \$70,000 per violation.

**Willful Violation:** This is a violation in which: (1), the employer committed an intentional and knowing, as contrasted with inadvertent, violation, and the employer was conscious that what he was doing constituted a violation, or (2), the employer, even though not consciously committing a violation, was aware that a hazardous condition existed and made no reasonable effort to eliminate the condition. The maximum penalty is \$70,000 per violation.

**Criminal-Willful Violation:** This is the same as willful but it results in the death of an employee. The maximum penalty is \$70,000 per violation and/or by imprisonment for up to six months. The fines and imprisonment can be doubled for a second conviction. In cases where an employer's negligent or unlawful conduct is egregious, a more severe criminal penalty is warranted. In these cases, the Commissioner of Labor and Industry has the authority to recommend that the local Commonwealth's Attorney bring a charge of manslaughter against the violator.

**De Minimis Violation:** This violation has no direct or immediate relationship to safety and health. A citation is not issued for this type of violation, nor a penalty proposed.

## **15. Notification of Fatalities and Catastrophes**

Va. Code § 40.1-51.1.D states that all employers, regardless of the number of their employees, shall report to the Commissioner of Labor and Industry within eight (8) hours any work-related incident which results in the death of any employee or the in-patient hospitalization of three or more employees.

**NOTE:** Employers should consult Section 50 of the *VOSH Administrative Regulations Manual* for complete notification requirements.

Failure to timely notify VOSH of a fatality or catastrophe will result in a \$5,000 penalty.

For further information, contact the appropriate regional or field office of the Department of Labor and Industry listed on the following pages, or visit our website: [www.doli.virginia.gov](http://www.doli.virginia.gov).

### **VIRGINIA DEPARTMENT OF LABOR & INDUSTRY - Headquarters**

Powers-Taylor Building  
13 South Thirteenth Street  
Richmond, Virginia 23219-4160  
804.371.2327

#### **Regional Offices:**

##### **Central Regional Office**

North Run Office Park  
1570 East Parham Road  
Richmond, Virginia 23228  
804.371.3104

##### **Southwest Regional Office**

Brammer Village  
3013 Peters Creek Road  
Roanoke, Virginia 24019  
540.562.3580

##### **Tidewater Regional Office**

Interstate Corporate Center  
Bldg. 6, Suite 101  
6363 North Center Dr.  
Norfolk, Virginia 23502  
757.455.0891

##### **Northern Regional Office**

10515 Battleview Parkway  
Manassas, Virginia 20109  
703.392.0900

#### **Field Offices:**

##### **Abingdon Field Office**

The Johnson Center  
468 East Main St., Suite 114  
Abingdon, Virginia 24210  
276.676.5465

##### **Lynchburg Field Office**

3704 Old Forest Rd, Suite B  
Lynchburg, Virginia 24501  
434.385.0806

##### **Valley Field Office**

201 Lee Highway P.O.  
Verona, Virginia 24482  
540.248.9280

##### **Valley Mailing Address:**

Box 77  
Verona, Virginia 24482